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ADDRESS.

DELIVERED IN THE HALL OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA PRESS ASSOCIATION, AT ITS ANNIVERSARY MEETING, IN COLUMBIA, DECEMBER 7, 1853,

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Mr. President, and Gentlemen of the Press Association:

The Press has been called the vast engine of civilization. We cannot doubt the appropriateness of the remark when we contemplate the wonderful results which have followed in its train "as the promulgator of freedom to man in the glorious strife of social organization, in the pursuits of life, liberty, and happiness."

The Press, as the fulcrum and lever of the intellectual and moral world, has accomplished much for its elevation, and stands confessedly this day among the first and greatest means for the preservation of our "highest privileges on earth."

Where would the world be at this time without the Press?

Let us contrast the condition of those who now enjoy the exalted privileges and benefits which the press affords, with others upon whom its genial light has never dawned, and we have a satisfactory answer to this enquiry. The present social and political condition of France, (in many respects a polite and refined nation,) will serve to give us some idea of what the world would be without the privileges of a free press.

Austria is a glaring evidence of what oppression dares to do where the press is fettered. There its freedom of utterance is kept at bay *vi et armis.* There an hundred thousand gleaming swords and bristling bayonets tremble before its power. There the press is obliged to conform to the capricious notions of unreasonable tyrants, whose governments are precarious, and whose thrones are as unstable as the wind. Whenever the sword is the arbiter of the people's rights, liberty hangs upon a brittle thread; when the press is awed into silence by the force of arms, the tyrant holds his power by an uncertain tenure. The sword may conquer a peace, but the press must preserve or destroy it, for the pen is mightier than the sword. Their relative influence is aptly illustrated in a figure which represents the Cap of Liberty poised above the scales of justice; in one side of the balance is laid a ponderous sword, in the other a simple pen, but the artist has made it appear that the smaller instrument, the pen, outweighs the larger, the sword. Is the illustration not a good one? Does not our experience and that of the past bear testimony that the *press* is the glorious palladium of our civil and religious liberties? "The strong arm and support of man in the defence and maintenance of his inherent rights as a member of the social compact; the vindicator of his claims to the exalted station of one stamped in the express image of God." It is emphatically "man's charter of freedom, and holds the integrity of our highest privileges on earth: freedom of enquiry, freedom of utterance, and the vast behests of civil communion with the kindred of every nation and the tongues of every speech."

A curious instance we have seen stated of the involuntary homage which the sword will sometimes pay to the pen, even in countries the most despotically ruled, is given in that of a Milanese Journal, whose editor had published in its columns some articles on the question of capital punishment. Articles breathing something of the mild and philosopical spirit of the great Milan Jurist, Beccaria.

The military commander, though he had an hundred thousand men [illegible] for the results, if such questions were to be publicly discussed, and he sent and informed the editor that if any more arguments were printed in his journal against the punishment of death, that journal should be at once suppressed. This is at least one admission of the fact that the pen is mightier than the sword.

Where is the world now with the press?

The imagination is not called upon, nor is the mind taxed with difficulty in answering this enquiry. If we contemplate the condition of the civilized world this day, where the liberty of the press is acknowledged, where freedom of thought and of speech is alike guaranteed to the rich and to the poor, where an enlightened and liberal public mind accords to the pen its triumph over the sword, where reason and justice have their perfect work, we have the complete and satisfactory answers to this question.

Take, for illustration, England and America, the two greatest, proudest, and best governments upon earth, in which the freedom of the press is now unquestionable.

It is not enough that we ask what has the press done for man?—But we should rather ask, what has the press *not* done for the world?

It is stated of the illustrious Webster, whose friends by common consent have given the appellation of the Great Defender of the Constitution, that when he delivered the oration at Bunker Hill, he pointed to the just completed monument and exclaimed, "there stands the orator of the day!" Of the press, with its beneficent results, we too may say, there it stands demonstrating in glowing language that knowledge *is* power.

That the press has aided, and is aiding vastly, in the distribution of knowledge among the masses of the world can scarcely be questioned. Christian enterprise, with the light of reason and religion, is forcing the powers of darkness to give back, and through the glimmerings of approaching day, we espy the dawning of a brighter and more glorious era upon the world. The advancement of Christianity is preparing the way for the approach of the vast engine of civilization, the press, and soon,

"Where the golden gates of day
Open on the palmy east,"

will this representation of truth and knowledge be found proclaiming with its myriad trumpet tongues, auxiliary to the faithful heralds of the Cross, "Glad tidings of great joy." And China, bound in chains of idolatrous error, and shut out of the pale of civilization by walls of adamant, will be penetrated, her idols dethroned by the Bible and the press. Upon her turrets,

"Where the aspirant minaret
Gleams along the morning sky,"

shall the banner of the Cross be raised, and the "living light of Heaven" illume the Celestial empire of the eastern world.

It is too late now, in the Progress of the world for one to tell us that the press is not a mighty engine of knowledge and civilization. We cannot doubt but that through its instrumentality thousands have been redeemed and saved to the world, whose minds have been developed and cultivated, and many of the purest and brightest gems which have adorned the glittering crown of earthly glory, have been discovered among the rubbish of the earth, and through the agency of the press, have been elevated, refined and polished, and set like stars in the galaxy of fame to shine forever,

"As mighty beacons lighting glory's way."

Eminently so has been the case in our country, where the road to fame and fortune lies open, free alike to all! Where

"Worth makes the man,
And want of it the fellow."

Where it does not follow as a matter of course because a man has not wealth and illustrious ancestry to bolster him above the smiles and frowns of popular favor, that he may not ascend even unto the very *acme* of fame and enrol himself high among the proudest and best of earth. Where the aristocracy of refined and cultivated mind is obliged to be acknowledged at last pre-eminently exalted above that of mere wealth and titled ancestry. In confirmation of this we may proudly refer to the biography of our country, to those who have made themselves immortal, and departing left behind them "Footprints on the shores of time."

In Franklin, the great pioneer of the press, we see what industry, a persevering will, and genius can accomplish.

For the purpose of introducing a few items connected with the early history of the press in our country, mentioned in the life of our illustrious patriot and eminent craftsman, we shall embrace the occasion to give an incident or two in the life of this very remarkable man.

At this late day it appears almost a miracle that Franklin, an apprentice to a business not at all congenial to his taste or to the acquisition of knowledge, but, on the contrary, calculated in its very nature to familiarize the mind with the common drudgeries of life, and to dispel and destroy all the aspirations of youth, that he should so soon be metamorphosed from the trimmer of wicks and moulder of candles to that of the moulder of public opinion, a difference of position requiring a very decided difference of ability.

Just at this point the history of the philosopher assumes a most interesting and instructive character, which serves to illustrate with force and sublimity the couplet of the poet:

"The clouds may drop down titles and estates,
Wealth may seek us, but wisdom must be sought."

You will recollect gentlemen, that Franklin's debut as a printer was not under the most flattering auspices; there is scarcely one among us who has ever been called upon, either in the prosecution of his physical or mental labors, to endure what he was called upon in his early manhood to bear; but Franklin proved the truth of the proverb that hard labor overcomes all things. Unlike the most of youths, his early life was occupied in efforts after knowledge, "her ample page, rich with the spoils of time had been unrolled," and his eager mind and panting soul thirsted for a full draught from the Pierian spring. Not having the means to purchase proper books he was necessarily dependent upon voluntary contributions in the way of loans, and consequently at so early a period in the history of typography he could have access to but few.

What would Franklin have given for the exalted priviliges which we now enjoy. Whilst the teeming press is daily pouring forth its volumes by hundreds and thousands? He tells us how he managed to procure the reading of such books as were otherwise beyond his reach.

An acquaintance with the apprentices of booksellers enabled him sometimes to borrow a small volume, which he was careful to return soon and clean. Often he sat up in his chamber during the greater part of the night reading, when the book was borrowed in the evening and to be returned on the following morning lest its absence should be discovered.

Is it any wonder that he should subsequently have arrived at such extraordinary distinction, and that the name of Benjamin Franklin, the poor, obscure printer, should stand today in undying characters upon the pages of immortality, carried upon the lightning's wing, and honored among all men wherever "liberty is cherished or virtue receives an approving sentence in the human heart?"

Franklin, as a printer, is introduced to our notice as an apprentice to his brother in the office of the "New England Courant," the fourth newspaper printed at that time in [illegible] was regarded as a dangerous speculation, and the elder Franklin was advised by his friends not to go into the undertaking, as it would scarcely succeed, there being already two or three papers in America, which were considered sufficient for the reading public. What, think you, gentlemen, would be their advice to some of us *now*, after the lapse of one hundred and thirty-two years, and in the increased and increasing number of our four hundred and twenty-two millions of publications annually in the United States?

Franklin informs us, in his interesting autobiography, that his brother treated him rather unkindly, and that by a mere accidental revolution in the wheel of fortune he was relieved from under his domination. The elder Franklin, it appears, in some articles of his paper gave offence to the representatives of the Crown, whereupon he was arrested and ordered before the Assembly in Boston, censured and imprisoned for a month by the speaker's warrant, because the name of the author of the offensive article was not discovered.

By the imprisonment of his brother, Benjamin Franklin became the manager of the paper, during which time he says he made bold to give their rulers some severe rubs in it; a faint prelude it was of what followed in after years from

"Him whose genius gave
To tyrant's hopes an early grave."

James Franklin was discharged upon condition that he should no longer print the New England Courant.

This, says Mr. Sparks, was probably the first transaction in the American Colonies relating to the freedom of the press, and it is not less remarkable for the assumption of power on the part of the Legislature, than for their disregard of the first principles, and established forms of law.

I do not propose, gentlemen, to consume my time and weary your patience with an enumeration of the early difficulties and trials through which our illustrious typo was called to pass, but I ask your indulgence a little further, that I may introduce one or two circumstances which occurred in the life of this wonderful man, which is certainly one of the most remarkable histories, all things considered, which the pen of the biographer has ever recorded.

Whilst engaged in the early publication of the Pennsylvania Gazette, Mr. Franklin found occasion to remark with some degree of freedom, on the public conduct of one or two persons of high standing in Philadelphia. This course was disapproved of by some of his patrons, who sought an opportunity to convey to him their views of the subject, and what they represented to be the opinions of his friends. He listened patiently, and replied by requesting that they would favor him with their company at supper, and bring with them the other gentlemen who had expressed dissatisfaction. The time arrived and the guests assembled, he received them cordially and listened again to their friendly reproofs of his editorial conduct. At length supper was announced, but when the party seated themselves around the table, they were surprised to see nothing before them but two puddings made of coarse meal, called *saw dust puddings* in the common phrase, and a stone pitcher filled with water. He helped them all and then applied himself to his own plate, partaking freely of the repast and urging his friends to do the same. They taxed their politeness to the utmost, but in vain; their appetites refused obedience to the will. Perceiving their difficulty, Franklin at last arose and said, "My friends, any man who can subsist upon saw dust pudding and water, as I can, needs no man's patronage." Franklin's independence as an editor, gentlemen, is worthy of imitation; he was ever willing, where it was proper, to praise, but never afraid to blame.

A complete history of the press of our country would be interesting to many of us on the present occasion, and afford fruitful themes for thought and speculation, but as our limits are necessarily circumscribed, we can only glance at the wonderful results which have followed the rise and progress of the press.

It is sufficient for our present purpose that we know since the art of printing was discovered the world has made many steps in the progress of science and civilization.

Let us go back in our imagination fifty years, and we shall be surprised with the state of things at that period contrasted with the present age. Half a century ago steamboats were unknown; whilst at this time it is estimated that not less than three thousand are afloat on American waters alone. In 1800 there was not a Rail Road in the world, now there are nearly twenty-six thousand miles in operation and in course of construction in the United States, and about nineteen thousand in Europe. Fifty years ago it required some weeks to convey news from Washington to New Orleans, now not so many minutes as it then did weeks. The numerous lines of telegraph in full operation form a net work over the length and breadth of our land, to the extent of at least 24,000 miles of wire. Sixty-three years ago the first Cotton Factory in the United States was established in Rhode Island, now their number is almost countless, and throughout the land the busy whirl of the spindle and the ceaseless hum of the loom may be heard at almost every step.

Fifty years ago, the most rapid printing press was worked by hand power—now, by the application of steam, with the speed of lightning, 20,000 papers are printed in a single hour. Even this estimate will fall far short of what the press, in a very short time, will be able to accomplish, and we may reasonably expect that the number will be nearly if not quite doubled.

When Franklin commenced printing, three or four newspapers were considered, by the knowing ones, enough for the demands of the reading public—now, three thousand is a moderate estimate of the whole number of newspapers and periodicals in the United States, with an aggregate of about four hundred and twenty million copies printed annually, on an average of one publication for every 7000 free inhabitants in the States and Territories. *

We are emphatically in the age of wonders, and have the evidence daily before our eyes that there is scarce a limit to human progress.—The time cannot be very distant, judging from the past, when the two mighty worlds of waters shall be brought into close proximity, when railroads and telegraphs will become as common as post-roads, when the science of making two blades of grass grow where none grew before, will have reached the highest possible point of perfection.

We are lost in wonder and and amazement, even now, at the results of human progress, which have crowned with the most complete success experiments which, to faint and glimmering reason, seemed but the idle vaporings of fancy.

The wisdom of the great poet is apparent in his proverb, that nothing is too difficult for mortals to do.

The day for doubting the truth and existence of scientific facts has drawn to a close; there are certain stubborn things which we are compelled to believe, despite our own preconceived opinions; and when we contemplate the extent and power of mind over matter, and of intelligence over ignorance, we do not wonder at the enthusiasm of the ancient philosoper Archimedes when he exclaimed, give me a fulcrum, and I will move the world. Of course, with all the wisdom of the great philosopher, this remark was a mere "metaphysical speculation," and a literal impossibility, but as a figurative expression, it serves to illustrate how far the human conception may be carried.

[illegible] ever which moves the intellectual world; every revolution in modern times has been effected in some way or other by its controlling influence; its power has been felt, for or against the enterprise, whether in social or political reform.

In our zeal, we do not claim infallibility for the press, for whilst it has done incalculable good, we believe it has also done immense harm.

When the freedom of the press is abused and perverted, and it is made an instrument for vile and selfish purposes, it at once becomes a curse, and loses its claims to respect and protection. When made the vehicle of harm, it becomes a scourge upon humanity, and one of such fearful magaitude, that it should be in every case summarily arrested.

The good which the press has done for the world is so great that we lose sight of the evil in beholding the magnitude of its excellence.

We may safely assume that the press of our country has done more than any other direct means to develope its resources, to regulate and render effective our laws, to infuse life and vigorous action into the whole body politic, to aid and complete useful and worthy enterprises, in short, what has the press not done? Turn where we may, it stands as a beacon light amidst the angry waves of political strife and social reform.—In it we behold a sure defence against error and vice, and we look with confidence to the press to aid in every work which has in view the common good of our country. The people have learned now to look to the press, on every occasion when an opinion is necessary, in regard to all questions of public interest.

The press is expected to take the lead on all occasions, and that press which does not lead, but is lead, fulfils no part of its destiny, for the press, to be useful and effective, must be free. We glory in the proud satisfaction that the press of our country is free, but let its freedom not be abused. The freedom we claim for the press is, that it shall speak for itself on all occasions, and not be controlled and restricted by party limitations, and subverted to party purposes alone, but a bold and fearless advocacy of what is right, without respect to the opinions of those who would destroy its free agency.

If we deprive the press of its volition (we mean, of course, the conductors of the press,) we will most assuredly destroy its power, and if narrowed down to certain limitations and stringent regulations, it would become very soon a mere machine, accomplishing little or no good for society in general.

The press must be free in the discharge of its legitimate functions.—There is, to some extent, a qualified sense in which the freedom of the press must be regarded. It ought not to be *too* free; there is reason in all things, and when the press, in its conscious independence and freedom, oversteps the bounds of reason and justice, then it should be regulated.

There are laws for the proper regulation of society in all its parts, to punish offenders against its peace, as well as to protect its law-abiding and useful citizens; he who aids and gives his countenance and support to that which tends to corrupt and vitiate the public morals, should be restrained, and, if need be, punished. We mean, by the freedom of the press, a proper regulated freedom, which an enlightened and discriminating public is ever ready to sustain.

To discharge its duty properly the press must be the exponent of correct public sentiment so far as it is possible, and the supporter of whatever is right, for its influence will always be felt and acknowledged when the public good is its aim.

The tone and character of a people may be judged of correctly by the press which they sustain; if it be the representative of truth and virtue, the people will be found truthful and virtuous. If it be the opposite of these, then we may reasonably expect the opposite effect.

There is an irresistible influence which belongs to the press; and as little as we may really think about it, the press exercises, by a greater influence over us, in the formation of our views and expressions of opinions, than we are apt to think, or even willing to admit.

The habitual reader of a newspaper is very apt to think of and [illegible] matters in the same light as the editor does whose paper he reads—there is an unseen agency constantly at work upon the mind which may not be detected at once, and which time alone can develope; still it is there, steadily enjoyed, pursuing its undeviating course; and the effects of this power, although scarcely perceptible to one's own mind, [illegible] very obvious to others.

Our feelings may not be suddenly aroused and exercised by reading, the effect is not likely to come upon us as a torrent, bearing before it our reason and our passions—such a feeling as is often inspired when the orator speaks in thunder tones of power and eloquence; but the still small voice of the press, is heard when the accents of the speaker have ceased, and the vibrations of the orator's voice upon the delighted ear are heard far away in the dim and almost forgotten distance.

The press is *felt* when passion subsides and reason assumes her wonted sway. The voice of the press is heard where the orator is not seen.

It speaks to the cloistered monk, exiled to himself, and buried amid the mystic lore of ages past.

It speaks to the student after fame, who cons the classic page by his lamp but dimly burning.

It steals, as a ray of light, into the lonely cell of the condemned culprit, and bids him still to hope.

Its whisperings are heard by her of maiden meditation fancy free, as love's sweetest music, who reads of her lover far away, who on battle fields may have glory won.

As a welcome visitor it is found by the fireside of the humble peasant, as well as in the decorated hall of the high-born and the great.

It has been truly said that a newspaper may drop the same idea into a thousand minds at the same time as many miles apart. The truth cannot be disguised or questioned, that the press has tremendous influence either for good or evil; hence the necessity that the press should be confided to safe hands—to those who have character and position to sustain, and who will properly respect themselves as well as others.

Into our hands, gentlemen, as conductors of the press, no small responsibility has been committed. The press is the great palladium of our liberties, and the defender of the people's rights. We are its guardians. As faithful sentinels it is our duty to preserve inviolable the sacred trust committed to our keeping. The public good should be our constant aim.

Let none suppose it to be a small matter to be the conductor of a press—there is more than a name in it; for we stand as the controlling engineers upon this mighty engine of knowledge and power. We hold in our hands the only lever which can ever move the world.

There are responsibilities and duties connected with our vocation which do not always end when our connection may cease officially with the press, or we cease to have a physical existence among men; we are living for the future, our works are to be seen and commented upon long after we shall have taken our journey with

"That innumerable caravan, that moves
To that mysterious realm."

The present and the future are of more interest to us than the past. We should ignore the past only [illegible] may strike us profitably. We cannot recall the past, it is gone! Let it go!

It is in no spirit of dictation, gentlemen that I indulge a few thoughts on the duties of those who conduct the press. I see around me those who are older and wiser, and from whom I would gladly receive instruction and advice; but as I am indebted more to your personal kindness for the position which I now occupy than to any other claim which I could hope to have upon your favor, I will trespass a little longer upon your time and patience, hoping that no one will receive amiss that which is offered in a spirit of kindness and fraternal regard.

The elevated position of the press in our State is a subject of sincere congratulation; the manifest improvement in the spirit and manner of the papers and periodicals issued here, is not the less gratifying to every philanthropic heart, as it evidences that a new era has dawned upon us; that we have a proper regard for our own reputation, as well as a decent respect for the opinions of those we represent.

A thought here occurs which I cannot omit, and which may be appropriately presented in this connection. It is this: Whilst we repudiate the idea of the press conforming itself to every change and variety of public opinion, yet there is a proper respect always due to public opinion; and we hold that any man is to be avoided who boasts of his indifference to the opinions of others, and who shows in his actions, which speak more truthfully than words, his total disregard for even the common courtesies of life. Of course, gentlemen, public opinion is to be respected only so far as it is right. And in the observance of this, the exercise of a great deal of good judgment is necessary. No man ought to yield, on any and every occasion, his assent to everything which public opinion may demand; it is sometimes unreasonable, and, as a good writer says, seldom errs on the score of charity. The public opinion which we ought to respect has been defined "a liberal and enlightened public opinion, whose approbation is the result of mature wisdom, and whose just condemnation is tempered with generosity."

It is, gentlemen of the Press Association, a matter of sincere gratification that so many of us are allowed to convene this evening together in one bond of common union and brotherhood, in the celebration of our first Anniversory. It is gratifying that, during the past year, nothing has occured to disturb seriously those social and friendly relations which were formed at our first convocation, but a free and courteous interchange of opinion generally has characterized the conductors of the press in our State. Whilst we have cause to regret the absence of many of our former associates and contemporaries, who have retired from the contest with their well-earned laurels fresh upon them, we have much cause for congratulation in the fact that their places are all filled with new and vigorous recruits, who are destined to do good service in this noble cause.

Let us, gentlemen, cultivate even a stronger feeling of union among ourselves, and observe in all our controversies with each other, a kind and manly bearing, never giving vent to the expression of vindictive or unworthy sentiments, but carefully preserve our characters as gentlemen, which, if done, will ensure us at all times a place [illegible] orable position among our fellow men; for politeness associations of life will cost no more than rudeness, and far a better and more profitable investment. Although [illegible] recriminate it may seem just"—let us always remember, the ger of arriving at hasty and unwarrantable conclusions—let tors, as gentlemen

"For every trifle scorn to take offence,
Which always shows great pride, or little sense,
Good nature and good sense should ever join:
To err is human, to forgive divine."

I ought, perhaps, just here to find my conclusion, but I have a few thoughts still left me. The remark has been made by some one, that editors and proprietors of public journals are often zealous in good measures not necessarily connected with their immediate vocation. It occurs to me that there is a great deal of truth in this remark, and that the world is often ignorant of what is done for its benefit, through the agency of the press. There is much that is good which we do, necessarily incidental to our calling, which the veil of privacy covers from the public gaze.

Popular education is a kindred subject with that which we have had under consideration, for unquestionably in proportion to the spread of intelligence among the masses will they become a reading people, and,

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* I am indebted for many of these statistics to the admirable report of the Seventh Census, an abstract of which has been published by Prof. DeBow, whose appointment to the Census Bureau is a well merited tribute to talent and worth. I am also indebted for several interesting items, to Dr. Francis' Address, delivered before an association similar to ours, in January, 1852, in the city of New York.